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Understanding “Spanglish” and “Flemch”: A Comparative Analysis of American and Belgian Language Politics

Urvashi Wattal

I. Introduction

Globalization has been defined by various scholars, such as David Harvey and Ulrich Beck, as a rapid dissemination of information, ideas, and even people across the world. The process of globalization is witnessed on various platforms, including the economic, the political, and the cultural. Under pressure from global forces and institutions, the role of traditional nation-states is continuously being challenged. A prime example of such a force is the increasing influence of the European Union (EU) in shaping domestic policies within its member states. Globalization has not only made the world smaller in a technological sense, it has also highlighted issues of conflict and resurgent nationalism, while at the same time furthering the cause of Cosmopolitanism.¹

As politics, nations, and cultures change under pressure from globalization, so does the manner in which populations identify themselves in relation to these parameters. To address the assigned theme of Globalization in Comparative Perspective, I tackle the question of linguistic diversity in Belgium and the United States. This study investigates how language politics and, subsequently, the nationalism that it reinforces have been affected by globalization in countries that have linguistically diverse populations.

Multilingual societies have been the center of national ethnic conflict due to the fact that language diversity not only represents another form of diversity, but also alters the ability of people in a specific group

to participate completely in civil society and government.² As Will Kymlika and Alan Patten write:

A series of recent events has made it clear that language policy is central to many of the traditional themes and concepts of political theory, such as democracy, citizenship, nationhood, and the state. The rise of ethno-linguistic conflict in Eastern Europe, the resurgence of language-based secessionist movements in Catalonia, Flanders, and Quebec, the backlash against immigrant multiculturalism, and the difficulties in building a pan-European sense of European Union citizenship—in all of these cases, linguistic diversity complicates attempts to build stable and cohesive forms of political community.³

Political participation is very closely linked with the ability to communicate, and linguistic minorities have historically asserted the right to preserve their languages. Traditionally, language diversity has been a characteristic of multilingual societies, for instance in India, Belgium, and Switzerland, or countries with ethnic minorities like the Aborigines in Australia, where state-nationalism often conflicts with regional, ethnic, and linguistic divides. Now, with increasing immigration, a new kind of multilingual society is emerging, like that in the United States, which is poised to become the second largest country having Spanish speakers, as a result of increased immigration from South and Central America over the last few decades.

Ulrich Beck, while discussing cosmopolitanism and methodological nationalism, writes about how society was traditionally structured around the state and “the state’s claim to exercise power and control was the foundation of society...National societies also generate and preserve in this way the quasi-essentialist identities of everyday life, whose self evidence seems to derive from such tautological formulations as: Germans live in Germany, Japanese in Japan, Africans in Africa.”⁴ However, Beck argues that in an increasingly globalized world, these previous ideas about identity and nationalism are being rendered irrelevant or incomplete. Society based within the nation-state is now being replaced by a World Society. Globalization not only challenges existing national boundaries and communities, but also brings into confrontation old groups, as can be witnessed in Belgium. The purpose of this essay is to examine how globalization has affected and changed ethno-linguistic nationalism and identity formation. In particular, I will examine this phenomenon in Belgium, increasingly influenced by global governance structures like the EU, and in the

United States, with the previously mentioned example of Spanish-speaking communities. Secondly, this article will also examine how these two states have reacted to the issue and compare how the different approaches they employ affect identity formation in these two cases.

To examine how this phenomenon of ethno-linguistic nationalism in a globalized context is changing identity, this study will analyze political rhetoric and media representation to see how identity is being expressed and envisioned in the U.S. and Belgium with respect to the language issue. A significant portion of the primary sources includes the political positions of various parties in each country and the treatment of the issue by the media. I use these media sources as representations of rhetoric on the issue of identity and the public perception of the question. The essay consists of the following five sections and the preceding introduction. First, I contextualize the issue by summarizing existing literature on cultural rights, language politics, and preservation of linguistic diversity. The literature is divided into four broad categories. Second, I analyze the history and rhetoric that surrounds Hispanic immigration into the United States, including specifically the uproar over English-only laws. Third, I examine the history of linguistic diversity and regionalism in Belgium, culminating with the parliamentary crisis of 2007. This section utilizes media representation and commentary as primary sources, as well as rhetoric emerging from Flemish independence movements and political parties like the *Vlaams Belang*. Fourth, I delve into the question of a unified national identity, given the histories of division or conflict in the two countries. Finally, I assess what implications this has for globalization and cosmopolitanism and what lessons can be gathered.

II. Linguistic Diversity in Theoretical Context

A. In Support of Multiculturalism

In political theory over the years, language diversity has fallen under the rubric of multiculturalism and minority rights protection. The argument for cultural rights, as Kymlika⁵ describes, is based on the premise that traditional conceptions of nation-states are no longer valid, and that democracy itself is no guarantee for neutrality with respect to cultural practices. He argues that a democracy cannot be neutral when there is a diversity of languages. In its very nature, democracy will

favor the majority. Therefore, minority cultures and languages need special rights and protections.

Another argument in favor of minority language protection is the idea that language is not simply a means of communication, but also an expression of a particular culture. Els Witte and Harry van Velthoven write, "because of the strong symbolic value of language, language communities are more than a collection of those who speak the language. Therefore, intervening in a language community is interfering in a cultural community in which social awareness processes are taking place."⁶ Kymlika also argues that language is an essential part of this cultural category, which shapes our conception of human and individual rights themselves.⁷ Thus, protecting minority languages from the dominant language is crucial to the preservation of cultural rights.

B. Cultural Rights as Human Rights

Another approach to this issue, which overlaps in certain respects with the previous one, envisages the protection of cultural production as an inherent part of the Human Rights doctrine. David Beetham argues that since nation-states today do not consist of homogenous communities, human rights that use homogeneity as a precondition are not appropriate. Cultural rights are necessary, then, for preventing "majoritism," which is not a truly democratic system.⁸ The issue of language diversity has been absorbed within the debate surrounding cultural rights as human rights. Language diversity is being seen as a crucial issue within the realm of politics and cultural rights. This is because language determines the minority's ability to meaningfully participate in a democracy or a government. Omid Shabani writes: "participation, making choices, interacting with others, and so on, happens in a language. As such, language is said to be constitutive of one's political identity. From this perspective, then, there is a link between political life, culture, language, and identity."⁹ Thus the protection of linguistic minorities is important from the perspective of civil and political human rights.

Robert Dunbar cites another reason for protection of minority language rights, called the ecological basis, "under which linguistic diversity, like bio-diversity, is valued in and of itself."¹⁰ Within European law, this approach to minority language protection is affirmed through the Minority Languages Charter.

C. Cosmopolitan Perspective

The opposing view on this issue criticizes the multiculturalist perspective on the grounds that it is too rooted in difference, rather than focusing on what is held in common. Daniel Archibugi argues that linguistic diversity is not necessarily a problem for nationalism.¹¹ He supports the cosmopolitan view in which one language can be adopted for the purpose of public communication, without necessarily undermining languages spoken within certain groups and language communities. From Archibugi's perspective, the practical purpose of communication within a state served by a common language does not imply that one language has to be dominant politically, and appropriate structures need to be put in place to ensure that this does not happen. He argues:

[D]emocratic politics should imply the willingness of all players to make an effort to understand each other. Democratic politics depends on the willingness to overcome the barriers to mutual understanding, including the linguistic ones. Anytime there is a community of fate, a democrat should search the available methods to allow deliberation according to the two key conditions of political equality and participation. If linguistic diversity is an obstacle to equality and participation, some methods should be found to overcome it as it is exemplified by the Esperanto metaphor.¹²

Archibugi cites the examples of countries such as India, which has adopted a "neutral" language for the purpose of communication with linguistically diverse sections of its population, as a possible model for adopting this cosmopolitan approach to linguistic diversity. The multiculturalist perspective, according to Archibugi, tries to preserve diversity and focuses on difference, whereas the cosmopolitan ideal aims at hybridization. In the most extreme sense, cosmopolitanism could promote the development of a world language, like Esperanto.

Another criticism of the former perspective is the disregard of the socioeconomic impact of language segregation in favor of the cultural aspect. If learning the majority language is economically beneficial for a particular group, then it should not be discouraged under the banner of protecting minority cultures.¹³ The cosmopolitan perspective thus opposes multiculturalism for its exclusionary tendencies, and promotes cross-cultural understanding in favor of preserving difference simply for the sake of difference.

D. Authentic Nationalism Ideal

Another position on this issue that most directly confronts the previously mentioned ideas is the one espoused by writers like Samuel Huntington. This particular argument is especially relevant to the U.S. case study because it is based on the idea that countries need to protect their “authentic” or “original” culture and language. In his book, *Who are We?*, and article, “The Hispanic Challenge,” Huntington writes specifically about immigration to the United States and challenges to (what he claims is) the authentic American identity. Huntington makes the argument that the United States was founded on Anglo-Protestant principles and the English language played a crucial role in creating and developing what America stands for today. He argues that this “Americanism” needs to be preserved against influences coming from immigrants who are not assimilating into mainstream American society, unlike immigrants of the past.¹⁴

III. The English-Spanish Debate in the United States

At the same time as Mitt Romney, during his campaign for the Republican nomination for President of the United States, was making promises to further English-only legislation, his campaign was running advertisements in Spanish in an attempt to woo Hispanic-American voters. With the exception of a few candidates, presidential hopefuls in 2007 participated in the Spanish debate on the channel Univision, and Democrats Bill Richardson and Chris Dodd are both fluent in Spanish.¹⁵ This was the case during an election in which immigration had become an important electoral issue, and the policy of making English the official language in the United States became a proxy for rhetoric on immigration.¹⁶

A. English-Only Laws in U.S. Politics

Deborah Schildkraut describes how, over the last four decades, the ethno-linguistic make-up of the United States has changed significantly, mostly as a result of immigration from Central and South America.¹⁷ The issue of integrating or assimilating immigrants into “American” society has become an often debated and contested topic. This debate has now evolved from a question of integrating immigrants to how they are challenging “Americanism” and American identity, as the U.S.

is set to become the country with the second largest Spanish-speaking population.¹⁸ This discussion of linguistic diversity, often charged with underlying xenophobia, has since the 1980s resulted in English-only legislation in twenty-six states and a consideration of similar proposals in many others: "Before 1980 only three states, Nebraska, Illinois and Virginia, had declared English their *sole* 'official language.' By 1988, however, only three states, Maine, Vermont and Alaska, had not considered 'official English' laws."¹⁹ This move toward English-only laws is motivated by an image of immigrants as stuck in "ghettos," where there is no pressure or need to learn the language of the majority. The position in favor of English-only laws sees this as a question of preserving an American national identity, which is being threatened by immigrants. On the other hand, proponents of bilingual education and preservation of Spanish cite its cultural importance to Hispanic groups, as well as practical hardships that might be a consequence of an English-only policy, as reasons for their position.

B. The Question of American Identity

Just as these two positions are divided in their policy prescriptions, they also view the history of integration of immigrants differently. To prove his thesis that due to non-assimilation Hispanic immigration poses a radically new threat to American identity, Huntington makes the argument that the United States was founded in Anglo-Protestant tradition, and previous immigrants to the U.S. immediately absorbed this ideal. His main contention is that immigration in the last few decades is vastly different from previous waves because of its magnitude, the different income and education levels in the migrant groups, and finally, in their lack of desire to adopt the Anglo-Protestant tradition, which is most clear on the issue of learning English.²⁰ Jack Citrin et al. discuss this view of American identity concerned with language and write:

Proponents of 'English-only' contend that both historical experience and common sense teach that linguistic diversity threatens political cohesion and stability. Previous generations of immigrants understood that learning English was the vehicle of social integration and economic mobility, the 'agent' that caused people of widely different origins to 'melt' into Americans. To abandon the status of English as America's common tongue is, therefore, to risk a Tower of Babel, and undermine one of the last things that still holds this pluralistic society together.²¹

Huntington goes on to argue that this American national identity is now being challenged by globalization in the form of dual, transnational, and cosmopolitan identities:

In the final decades of the 20th Century however the United States' Anglo-Protestant culture and the creed that it produced came under assault by the popularity in intellectual and political circles of the doctrines of multiculturalism and diversity; the rise of group identities based on race, ethnicity, and gender over national identity; the impact of transnational diasporas; the expanding number of immigrants with dual nationalities and dual loyalties; and the growing salience for U.S. intellectual, business and political elites of cosmopolitan and transnational identities. The United States' national identity, like that of other nation-states, is challenged by the forces of globalization as well as the needs that globalization produces among people for smaller and more meaningful 'blood and belief' identities.²²

On the other hand, the critics of his position argue for a more multiculturalist perspective, or alternatively focus on the practical aspects of the issue, for instance, problems immigrants might face if they do not understand English and have to deal with a health emergency when the forms are only available in English. Another point raised in opposition to restrictive language laws is the idea that American identity is based on immigration and diversity, and language is seen simply as another form of this diversity and thus should be protected. Critics of Huntington's position make the argument that he over-romanticizes assimilation in the previous generations of immigrants. Further, the fact that Hispanic immigrants in the first generation do not speak English is not reflective of a desire to not become "American," but rather a consequence of other factors.²³

C. English Acquisition in Hispanic Communities

The bone of contention for groups that advocate "official English" policies is the idea that Hispanic immigrants deliberately choose to segregate themselves from the rest of the population and this is manifested in their supposed desire not to learn English. This argument, however, ignores some basic socioeconomic realities that play a much greater role in a migrant's ability to integrate than intent or desire.²⁴ The facts suggest that second-generation and third-generation immigrants with Hispanic backgrounds are learning English at the same rate as other

immigrant groups have in the past. The general trend when it comes to the acquisition of English among migrants is that (unless they are from an English-speaking country) first-generation immigrants tend to have limited fluency in English, and their children, embarrassed by this fact, often abandon the native language of their parents. Thus, fluency in the first language of immigrant communities would often end.²⁵ The crucial difference between previous and current waves of immigration is that the rate of retention of Spanish in successive generations is higher. This can be attributed to the fact that there appears to be a greater sense of pride in Spanish among the community.²⁶ In addition, Huntington's critique of multiculturalism with respect to language also overlooks the fact that for a lot of first-generation immigrants it is nearly impossible to learn English, due to lack of funds, previous lack of access to education, and current excessive working hours.²⁷ Often first-generation Hispanic immigrants work with other immigrants of similar backgrounds, at minimum wage, and are thus unable to afford the cost of learning English. At the same time, statistics suggest that the demand for English as a Second Language classes often exceeds the supply.²⁸

The same fears expressed by Huntington about Hispanic immigration were earlier expressed about German, Italian, and Irish immigrants.²⁹ The idea that "Americanism" is exclusively associated with Anglo-Protestant tradition excludes all positive contributions that successive waves of immigration have made to the United States. Political rhetoric, when it supports the cause of immigrants, absorbs the idea of the "melting pot" and projects the image of the United States as a nation of immigrants, an idea that Huntington rejects.

Another argument raised against English-only laws is what this implies for the many languages spoken by Native-American populations. The focus on English-only laws relegates these populations into a secondary status since their language becomes dispensable. Thus, this new wave of migration and specifically the question of having an official language is challenging and re-envisioning American identity. Now, due to the magnitude of immigration into the U.S., non-native speakers are either voluntarily or through encouragement learning English. Globalization, through migration, is resulting within the U.S. in two opposing forces. One position supports a more cosmopolitan view of the issue, with attempts to move beyond strict notions of Americanism and bring into the American fold new cultural features. The other side of the debate, often playing on xenophobic sentiments,

presents migrants as threats to their “authentic” ideas of American identity. In the U.S., language has become the issue that is being used to symbolize this conflict of identities.

IV. Flemish and French Nationalism in Belgium

A. History of Belgian Language Policy

In December 2006, a French-language television station broke the story of the secession of Flanders, the Flemish-speaking northern part of the country, from the rest of Belgium. The program, “Bye Bye Belgium,” was inspired by Orson Welles’ 1938 hoax broadcast announcing the invasion of Earth from Mars. The joke, however, did not sit well with most of the audience, where nine out of ten people believed it and flooded the television channel’s switchboard.³⁰ This television hoax exemplifies in many ways the current political climate in Belgium. Commentators, politicians, and the Belgian people themselves often predict the inevitable breakup of Belgium. Thus, the fact that such a large number of viewers believed this story is not completely surprising.

In terms of language diversity and politics, Belgium is not particularly unique because, in fact, linguistically homogenous states are rare. Belgium has experienced throughout its history various political experiments in order to come up with a viable system for its linguistically diverse populations.³¹ This history of reform makes for an important case in the field of language politics. The focus in this section is the recent crisis in the Belgian Federal Government after the 2007 elections, which was resolved in March 2008. The media had predicted possibilities of a break-up of the state, since no consensus could be reached between the different language groups in electing a federal government after there was no clear winner in the parliamentary elections.

From its very inception Belgium has been a linguistically divided country that was created, in 1831, as a buffer between the Germanic north and the Latin south regions of Europe. Belgium consisted of the northern Flemish-speaking population and the southern French speakers. Initially, French was the language of the elites in Belgium, not just in Walloon but also in Flanders. For years, populations monolingual in Flemish were economically and politically oppressed. Economically, Walloon remained the most important sector of the Belgian economy due to the heavy concentration of industries. This was the case for most of the first half of the twentieth century. Until 1932 it was not pos-

sible to study in Flemish at a Belgian university. It wasn't until 1970, when Belgium became increasingly federalized and power was given to regional governments, that Flanders gained equal footing in political matters.³²

Due to the shift in economic situations, when the coalmines in Walloon lost their importance, French has for the most part lost its status as an elite language. In fact, it has experienced a backlash from Flanders against what was perceived as francophone hegemony. In the years when French reigned supreme, the Walloon population made no attempt to learn Flemish, while the Flemish speakers were expected to master French. As industries in the south lost their economic value and Flanders became the region of economic prosperity in Belgium, Walloon has become politically expendable and the prestige of the language and culture has also diminished.³³

B. Current Political Climate

Since the democratization in the middle of the twentieth century, six separate regional governments were established within Belgium: in Walloon, Flanders, Brussels, and further for the three main language groups Flemish, French and German. These regional governments controlled most of the responsibilities of the state. The regional government of Flanders and the Flemish language parliament have actually merged into one government. French speakers can only vote for politicians from Walloon and Flemish speakers can only vote for other Flanders natives. Even in Brussels, which is technically bilingual, French speakers may only vote for fellow French speakers. This strictly federal and divided electoral system has come to be considered the most feasible solution to Belgium's dilemma in dealing with its diverse communities.³⁴ In addition to the regional governments there exists a central federal government, which has handed over a significant amount of control and power to the various regions.

There have been critics as well as proponents of language rights with respect to the Flemish speakers. The proponents view the issue as a need to protect Flemish heritage from francophone hegemony. The critics mostly oppose the manner in which these language rights have been fought for, and specifically the insistence on constructing nationalism through this point of difference, rather than the more cosmopolitan view that Archibugi adopts.³⁵ For instance, to reassert Flemish as an important language in the Belgian context, it has been standardized

to resemble Dutch, rather than using traditional Flemish. In effect, Belgium consists of two distinct and often antagonistic cultural and linguistic communities.³⁶ The divisions undermine any national Belgian identity that might exist and have led commentators to question whether there is any such thing as a truly and completely Belgian person.³⁷

C. Pro-Flemish Nationalists Position

Flemish independence movements in Belgium point out that under the new EU regime, Belgium as a nation-state does not really exist anymore. In other words, there is no Belgian nationality or identity in this highly federalized environment.³⁷ Over the years, unemployment rose in Walloon, and Flanders became rich. The floundering Walloon economy has increased desire for secession in Flanders, which contains the majority of the nation's population. Walloon is often portrayed in Flanders as a drain on the Belgian economy, and many believe that the Flemish population is subsidizing Walloon's economy. Vlaams Belang is a right-wing, pro-Flemish independence party that has supported this image of Flanders as an independent state.³⁸ The economic aspects of the language divide in Belgium have also affected the representation of each side by the other. In the media and by politicians on both sides, images of Walloon and Flanders are promoted that seek to maintain a division between the two groups. Due to the economic status of the region, people from Walloon are often caricatured as being lazy, arrogant drains on the resources of the northern part of the country. At the same time, due to the election of various moderate-to-conservative politicians in Flanders, the Flemish have often been represented in Walloon as right wing, closed-minded, and bigoted.³⁹

It has been argued that the division between the two groups is perhaps the only thing characteristically Belgian. Politicians, writers, commentators, and others have reasserted the fact that there is no such thing as a Belgian identity: "Flanders tends to vote right. Wallonia left. The two societies have different school systems, watch different television and theatre, sing different versions of the national anthem."⁴⁰ Flemish poet, Leonard Nolens, said about the question of Belgian identity, "I was born in Belgium, but Belgium was never born in me." The inability to find nationalism and a common identity has been the subject of amusement for commentators and writers writing about Belgium. Van Den Braembussche writes, "The uneasiness that

comes with being Belgian stems from two longstanding problems. The first proceeds from the perception that Belgium is an *artificial* construction, a nation made up of at least two different peoples and always on the edge of breaking up into its linguistic communities."⁴¹

D. The Role of the European Union

As one of the founding members of the European Union, and with Brussels being the seat of countless European Parliament activities, Belgium is physically and metaphorically being changed by politics at the European level. Under the European Human Rights Law and the Minority Languages Charter, Europe has granted to the minorities within its member states a myriad of rights. Often membership is only granted when states are seen as providing protection for the minorities in their own countries.⁴² For countries such as Belgium and Spain, which already have highly federalized government structures in place to protect the different cultural or lingual groups within their population, the growing power of the EU has resulted in a crisis of power for their central governments.

With the rise of the EU, Belgians are now looking outward for an overarching political establishment. One consequence of globalization for Belgium is the fact that Belgians on either side of the divide are now more reluctant than ever to learn the other side's language, and English, the global lingua franca, has become the second language of choice for most Belgians.⁴³ Furthermore, politicians who favor a division of the country argue that between the regional governments and a large number of responsibilities being transferred to the EU, the Belgian federal government is no longer of any value. At the same time, the presence of the EU is giving Belgium a new identity to unite under, and, in the form of English, a language for communication.⁴⁴

In terms of European politics, globalization undeniably is calling into question previous ideas about nationhood as theorists, politicians, and citizens search for a unified European identity. A part of this shift in defining identity also affects how old conflicts are understood in this new era. In Belgium, Europe could, and to a certain extent already has, become a source for a new identity that simultaneously pulls the different factions in Belgium apart, but also unites them under the banner of Europe.

E. Parliamentary Crisis of 2007

Since Belgium's electoral system was reformed, for thirty years the Federal government has been dominated by moderate Flemish politicians, as Flemish speakers make up almost sixty percent of the Belgian population. In the 2007 election, however, no single party managed to win the election outright and no compromise could be reached.⁴⁵ The crisis brought to the fore Belgium's now 177-year struggle with keeping its two halves united, given increasing demands from the Flemish side for an even greater federalization of powers. During the crisis many political commentators asserted that Belgium was on the brink of breaking up, as the country had no federal government in place for more than 250 days.⁴⁶

Given the highly federalized nature of the state in Belgium and increasing power in the hands of the EU, on the surface it might appear that the Belgian federal government has lost its value, and thus the question of secession seems inevitable. Despite these events and political positions, according to recent polls seventy-two percent of all Belgians support a unified Belgian state, and a majority of the Flemish population also opposes secession.⁴⁷ The majority of the population still might not favor a common language for the purpose of communication, but it does support the idea of a common state. Even if its actual powers might be limited, the symbolic value of such a unified state is significant.

V. Conclusions

A. The Possibilities for National Identities

In Belgium, years of battle over a viable language policy has led to the formation of a highly federalized state, and in the U.S., there is currently polarization on the issue of language, with one political party trying to attract potential Hispanic voters and the other bringing English-only laws to the table. With the increased presence of the EU, it has been argued by certain politicians that a unified Belgian state does not exist in practice, due to an increasingly weakened federal government. However, the majority of the population still seems to be holding on to an idea of a unified Belgian identity. Thus even in Belgium, despite the electoral crisis and the fractured and divisive identity politics, the majority still espouses, or at least prefers, a more cosmopolitan view

on the issue of linguistic diversity. While there is no common language of communication between Flanders and Walloon, this does not seem to be an insurmountable obstacle for the continuation of the state, though it obviously presents some problems.

In the United States, globalization as represented by immigration has exposed divisions in terms of how different groups define nationalism and an “American” identity. Amartya Sen writes that often theorists and commentators on the issue assume that there is a single source of identity for every human being, and ignore the plurality of identity. He calls this the “illusion of destiny.”⁴⁸ He writes: “Civilization or religious partitioning of the world population leads to a ‘solitarist’ approach to human identity, which sees human beings as members of exactly one group...A solitarist approach can be a good way of misunderstanding nearly everyone in the world.”⁴⁹ Thus, Sen is critical of any debate on identity that essentializes human beings into categories depending on only one factor. Using Anglo-Protestantism as the basis for American identity, Samuel Huntington would be committing this folly. Acknowledging that there are multiple contributions and sources that play a role in the formation of an American identity can become one way of adopting this cosmopolitan outlook. Huntington sees transnational identities as a hindrance to a supreme national identity, but a transnational and cosmopolitan outlook can overcome the antagonisms that characterize the current discussion on language in the United States.

B. Lessons about Globalization and Cosmopolitanism

The Belgian and American cases exemplify how globalizing forces are not necessarily cosmopolitan or ethnically restrictive. Depending on the politics of the day, nationalist sentiment can be manipulated into support for either deep ethnic divides or a more cosmopolitan narrative with the possibility of compromise. This idea of a cosmopolitan disposition is also explained by Tomlinson, who argues that cosmopolitanism is a worldview that acknowledges the “need to have a sense of wider cultural commitment—of belonging to the world as a whole.”⁵⁰ The idea of belonging to the world as a whole restricts the space for cultural difference. This does not mean that there are no local differences. Rather, with a cosmopolitan outlook, human beings can move away from these differences and focus on creating and sustaining a world community.

Tomlinson defines cosmopolitanism as extending moral commitment and solidarity beyond local contexts. The issue of language in the United States and Belgium shows that this idea is not applicable simply beyond national and continental borders, but also within nations. In fact, Belgium can be seen as an example for the EU and the rest of the world of a country that—despite its sources of difference and antagonisms—can remain a unified state, and that cultural difference does not have to become a hindrance to cross-cultural understanding. In the United States, restrictive views of nationalism on either side can prevent this sort of cross-cultural understanding. Tomlinson argues that in order to adopt a cosmopolitan ideal we have to “cease thinking in terms of antagonistic binary oppositions and try to think about the cosmopolitan disposition as something that does not have to exclude the perspective of the local.”⁵¹ In Belgium, despite rhetoric on both sides that views Flanders and Walloon as two distinct communities pitted against each other, there is the possibility of reconciliation and cooperation, and the presence of the EU allows for a shift from these binary oppositions. The interconnectedness with the rest of the world that we experience as a result of economics and technology cannot be reversed. Consequently, we are forced to operate with the knowledge that culture and identity cannot be fixed in space and time. This knowledge has an emancipatory power that can be used to resolve or at least move past cultural difference. Belgium has experienced this shift to a certain extent. Belgium has stayed unified despite its cultural differences, and this is a form of the cosmopolitan viewpoint.

In both these cases, the forces of globalization are exposing scars of conflict and division. The EU in Belgium can be seen as one reason for the cleavage of ties with the Belgian identity. In the U.S., the presence of immigrants with a supposedly different culture is leading to divisions on the question of what American identity is. At the same time, both of these cases also provide the opportunity for the development of a cosmopolitan ideal that Archibugi mentions. Belgium is often seen as a country deeply divided and on the brink of falling apart. Yet Belgium also offers lessons on how cultural difference can be accommodated within a national community. There might not be a tangible, strict, and nuanced conception of a Belgian national identity, but acknowledging the plurality of all identities and moving away from cultural antagonisms allow for a mutual coexistence and understanding. In the United States, instead of searching for true “Americanism,” the conception of identity as a malleable and dynamic concept can

reduce the antagonisms that emerge in the current debate. This new wave of immigration, rather than being perceived as a threat, can be seen as an opportunity to further cross-cultural understanding and critique. Thus, both of these cases show that globalization, in and of itself, cannot be thought of as simply divisive, nor can it be thought of as a panacea for global harmony. It is, however, a cosmopolitan disposition that allows us to negotiate past local differences and build a common identity despite cultural discontinuity. ●

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Notes

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